UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

FOR

GAME WITH SEQUENTIAL BONUS EVENT OPPORTUNITY

PREPARED BY:

WEIDE & MILLER, LTD.
7251 West Lake Mead Blvd., Suite 530
Las Vegas, NV 89128
(702)-382-4804

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This patent application is a non-provisional patent application from Provisional application U.S. Serial No. 60/454,822, filed March 13, 2003.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to games of skill and chance and more particularly, to a game having a first or main game providing a first opportunity for a win and having a bonus event providing an additional opportunity for one or more bonus wins.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Gaming continues to expand in popularity. Games of skill and chance may be played with or without wagers, and may be played in a variety of environments. Many games are offered for sale for play on game consoles, such as the XBOX® or PlayStation® consoles. These games are generally played for entertainment purposes. A number of games are presented for on-line or "Internet" play, using such devices as computers, PDAs, and cellular phones. These games may be played for recreational purposes, but also for reward or recognition.

[0004] In addition, a wide variety of games are offered for gambling purposes. For example, both land-based and on-line casino operations are located in or accessible from many jurisdictions/locations. These operations offer a variety of wager-type games such as slot or video type games.

[0005]   Game players continue to seek new and exciting games. One game feature which entices players is that the game offers a good chance, or at least the perception of a good chance, of receiving a winning outcome when playing the game. For example, gamblers desire to play gaming machines which can return the highest amount for their wagers. The amount returned is termed the "payout," while the amount kept or retained (by the gaming machine or operator) as a result of game play is referred to as the "hold." A game with a higher percentage payout generally provides the player with a higher opportunity for receiving winning rather than losing outcomes.

[0006]   Game players also like games which offer variety in game play. For example, one disadvantage to the standard gambling game of "slots" is that game play consists of the single activity of spinning a set of reels once and then determining if displayed symbols are a winning set of symbols. Continued play of the game consists of placing a bet, watching the gaming machine to view the game result, placing another bet, playing the game, and so on, which may cause players to lose interest.

[0007]   It is an object of the invention to provide a game which is exciting and attractive to game players.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008]   The invention is a method of playing a game and an environment for presenting a game for play, including an electronically controlled gaming device.

[0009]   A game of the invention has two parts or events. A first part of the game, or main game, comprises displaying one or more symbols. The symbols may be displayed in a matrix of positions. The outcome of the first game is dependent upon the symbols displayed. In one embodiment, a winning outcome of the main game results if one or more predetermined winning combinations of symbols are received along active paylines.

[0010]   The second part of the game comprises a bonus event. If the outcome of the main game is a winning outcome, then one or more symbols used to play the main game are automatically removed and replaced to generate a new combination or set of symbols. The outcome of the bonus event is dependent upon the new set of displayed symbols. In one embodiment, a winning bonus event results if one or more predetermined winning combinations of symbols are received along active paylines.

[0011]   In a preferred embodiment, if a winning result is achieved as a result of play of the bonus event, a successive bonus event is initiated and played. Successive bonus events may occur until a non-winning bonus event is achieved.

[0012] The game may be implemented as a wager type game. In such a version, a player may be paid an award, such as monies or credits, for receiving winning outcomes of the main game and bonus event(s).

[0013] The game may be played with a variety of symbols or indicia, including pictures, numbers letters, cards or the like. Various combinations of symbols may be designated as predetermined winning combinations of symbols.

[0014] The game may be implemented with a gaming device, such as an electronically controlled gaming machine including a video display for displaying the symbols. The game may also be presented on a device including mechanical reels which rotate to display symbols. The game may also be presented in printed form, such as on printed lottery type cards.

[0015] The game of the invention may also be presented as a secondary or bonus event to another game.

[0016] Further objects, features, and advantages of the present invention over the prior art will become apparent from the detailed description of the drawings which follows, when considered with the attached figures.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] FIGURE 1 illustrates a gaming machine of the type which may be used to present a game in accordance with the present invention;

[0018] FIGURE 2(a) illustrates an exemplary set of symbols displayed while playing one embodiment of a game of the invention;

[0019] FIGURE 2(b) illustrates paylines applied to the symbols displayed in the game of Figure 2(a);

[0020] FIGURE 2(c) illustrates the game of Figure 2(a) after symbols have been removed as a result of the play of the game;

[0021] FIGURE 2(d) illustrates the game of Figure 2(c) after the removed symbols have been replaced;

[0022] FIGURE 2(e) illustrates the game of Figure 2(d) after the symbols have been removed a second time;

[0023] FIGURE 2(f) illustrates the game of Figure 2(e) after the removed symbols have been replaced;

[0024]   FIGURE 3(a) illustrates an exemplary set of symbols displayed while playing a game in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

[0025]   FIGURE 3(b) illustrates the symbols of the game illustrated in Figure 3(a) after symbols have been removed;

[0026]   FIGURE 3(c) illustrates the game of Figure 3(b) after replacement symbols have been provided; and

[0027]   FIGURE 4 illustrates one configuration of displayed symbols in accordance with a game of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0028]   The invention is a game, including a method of playing the game and a device for presenting the game. In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough description of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known features have not been described in detail so as not to obscure the invention.

[0029]   In general, the invention comprises a game having two parts or events. A first part of the game, which may be referred to as a main or first game, comprises displaying a set of symbols. The outcome of the first game is dependent upon the symbols displayed. The second part of the game may be referred to as a bonus opportunity or event, or a secondary game. In general, if the outcome of the main game is a winning outcome, then one or more symbols used to play the main game are automatically removed and replaced to generate a new combination or set of symbols. The outcome of the bonus event is dependent upon the new set of displayed symbols.

[0030]   Various aspects of the game, including various embodiments of game play and devices for presenting the game, will now be described in more detail. Figure 1 illustrates one environment for play of the game of the present invention. As illustrated, a gaming machine or device 20 includes a housing 22 containing or supporting various components. The gaming machine or device 20 is, either alone or in combination with other devices, preferably configured to present a game of the invention. It will be appreciated that the housing 22 may have a variety of shapes and configurations.

[0031] As illustrated, the gaming machine 20 is a "video" type gaming device, and as such includes a video display 24. The display 24 may be of a variety of types now known or later developed, such as CRT, plasma, LCD or others. In general, the display 24 is configured to present information for viewing by a player of the gaming machine 20.

[0032] Means are provided for generating video content regarding a game, the video content provided to the video display 24 for display. In one embodiment, a gaming controller includes a processor and a memory. The memory stores software which is executed by the processor. The executed code creates video data which is provided, such as via a video controller, to the video display, causing the display to display game play information. The gaming controller is preferably located inside of the housing 22 of the gaming machine 20.

[0033] A wide variety of means may be provided for generating the video content. For example, in one embodiment, game data may be generated remotely, such as at a remote game server. The game data may then be downloaded to the gaming machine 20 via a wired or wireless communication link.

[0034] The gaming machine 20 preferably includes one or more player inputs which permit the player to interact with the gaming machine 20. In the embodiment illustrated, the gaming machine 20 includes a plurality of push-buttons. As illustrated, a "bet one" button 26, a "bet max" button 28 and a "cash out" button 30 may be provided. The functions of these buttons 26,28,30 are described in more detail below.

[0035]   A wide variety of other inputs may be provided, varying both in form and function. For example, in one embodiment, the video display 24 may comprise a "touch screen" type display. Other inputs, such as a rotatable arm (as is well known in the art of slot machines) may be provided. Each input preferably provides input, such as by way of an electrical signal, to the gaming controller or other game content generating device. In that manner, game play is interactive.

[0036]   In one embodiment, the gaming machine 20 is configured to present a game only upon a player placing a bet, wager, or payment. Thus, the gaming machine 20 may include means for accepting value. As illustrated, the gaming machine 20 may include a coin acceptor 32. The coin acceptor 32 may be configured to accept coins of one or more denominations. A coin sorter, coin hopper and other coin holding and processing devices may be located in the housing 22 of the gaming machine 20.

[0037]   The gaming machine 20 may also or alternatively include a bill validator 34. The bill validator 34 may be configured to accept paper money of one or more denominations. A bill stacker and other bill processing and storage devices may be located in the housing 22 of the gaming machine 20.

[0038]   The gaming machine 20 may also or alternatively include a ticket reader, smart card, credit card or other media acceptor/reader. Such devices may be utilized to obtain information regarding value, such as credit card account information or bar-coded ticket value.

[0039]   When value is provided to the gaming machine 20, the gaming machine 20 may be configured to display information regarding the provided value, such as in the form of "credit" information. This information may be displayed, for example, on the video display 24.

[0040]   The player may utilize inputs to place a wager, bet or provide payment to play a game. For example, a player may depress the "bet one" button 26 to bet or wager a single credit. A player may depress the "bet max" button 28 to bet or wager the maximum credits which can be wagered for a game.

[0041]   In one embodiment, the gaming machine 20 is configured to award winnings for winning outcomes of games played. The winnings may be paid or provided to the player in a variety of manners. In one embodiment, awards may be indicated in the form of credits. Thus, when a player wins, the total number of credits belonging to them is increased, and the increased amount may be displayed on the display 24. The player may utilize the awarded credits to play future games.

[0042]   In another embodiment, the player may be awarded money, or may convert credits to money. As illustrated, the gaming machine 20 may include a coin tray 36 into which coins may be dispensed. The coins may represent a specific award. Alternatively, the player may utilize the "cash out" button 30 and be paid the value of their credits in the form of coins.

[0043]   Other forms of payment may be provided, such as by issuance of a ticket which represents value. Non-monetary prizes may also be awarded. For example, credits may be redeemed for prizes

or a ticket or tickets may be redeemed for specific prizes or general prizes. In other embodiments, game play may be for entertainment purposes only and no prize or award may be won. In one embodiment, a player may win points which the player can accrue and use, such as for free game play. In another embodiment, no payment need be provided. For example, the game may be played for recreational purposes only. In other embodiments, points may be awarded, the points having no "value," except to provide the player an indication of the level of success of play of the game. Such a level of points may be compared, for example, to the level of points achieved by other players.

[0044]   The gaming machine 20 illustrated and described is just one embodiment of a device which may be used to present a game in accordance with the invention. Other devices may be utilized. For example, the gaming machine 20 may be a "slot" type machine including one or more mechanical rotating reels for displaying game information instead of or in addition to the video display 24.

[0045]   The gaming machine 20 may also comprise a computing device, such as a laptop or desktop computer. Game information may be transmitted via a communication link to a remote player. The communication link may include, for example, the Internet. The game information may be utilized by the remote player's computer, such as by displaying game information on an associated screen. A player may provide input via a keyboard, mouse or other input device.

[0046]   As described in more detail below, in one or more embodiments, the game of the invention need not be presented on an electrical or electro-mechanical device. For example, the game may be

presented in a printed, card type format. For example, in one embodiment, a physical lottery card may be purchased by a player and the one or more outcomes revealed by the player.

[0047]   One embodiment of a game of the invention will now be described with reference to Figures 2(a)-2(f). As described above, in order to establish entitlement to play the game of the invention, the player may be required to place a bet or wager or provide other payment. In one embodiment, as detailed below, the size of the bet or wager may affect the manner by which the outcome of the game is determined.

[0048]   In one embodiment, the game includes the step of playing a base, main or first game. In accordance with the game, a plurality of symbols or indicia 100 are displayed. The symbols 100 may be displayed in a number of ways, and may or may not be displayed at the same time. In the case of the gaming machine 20 illustrated in Figure 1, the symbols 100 are displayed on the video display 24. In the event the gaming machine utilizes mechanical reels, the symbols 100 may be displayed by rotating the one or more reels.

[0049]   As illustrated, the symbols 100 have been displayed in an n x m matrix. The size of the matrix may vary, with n and m assuming identical or different numeric values. As illustrated, the matrix is 3 x 3.

[0050]   In one embodiment, each symbol 100 is associated with a position. As illustrated, there are three rows R1, R2 and R3 and three columns C1, C2 and C3 of symbol positions.

[0051]   The symbol 100 which is displayed in a particular position may be generated in a variety of fashions. In one embodiment, an electronically generated random number controls which symbol 100 will be displayed in a position. In one embodiment, each position may initially be blank or void, and then the position is filled with a symbol 100. Alternatively, the position may be filled with one symbol, and then that symbol is replaced with the same or a different symbol 100.

[0052]   In the case of rotating reels, symbols 100 are located on a reel and the reel is rotated. One or more symbols 100 are associated with one or more positions when the reel is stopped. In the case of a video game, the symbol 100 is generated and then displayed in the position.

[0053]   In one embodiment, the symbol 100 which is displayed in each position is selected from a set of symbols, the set preferably including more than one different symbol. In the embodiment illustrated, the symbol 100 which is displayed in each position is preferably selected from a unique set of symbols. In that arrangement, the odds of receiving a particular symbol in a particular position is independent of the odds of receiving a symbol in any other position. In another embodiment, the symbols may all be selected from the same set or group of symbols. Each group of symbols need not include the same symbols or the same number of symbols.

[0054]   In the case of rotating reels, a different reel may be used to generate symbols for each position (i.e., 9 independent reels in the case of the embodiment illustrated in Figure 2(a)). Alternatively, one or more reels may be used to generate more than one symbol. For example, a single reel may be used to generate the symbols 100 in each column C1,C2,C3 of the matrix. In the

case of virtual reels, the images of the symbols may be generated in a variety of manners and be displayed in a variety of manners and locations.

[0055]   As indicated, the symbols 100 need not be displayed in a matrix format. The symbols may also be displayed in a variety of positions/orientations, including in a single row or column.

[0056]   The symbols 100 which may be displayed may vary. Figure 2(a) illustrates various symbols which may be utilized, those symbols comprising the card suit symbols ♡ ◇ ♧ and ♤. Any variety of symbols 100 may be utilized, however, including numbers, pictures, letters and the like.

[0057]   The one or more symbols 100 may be selected from a set of symbols. It will be appreciated that the odds of receiving particular symbols 100 is determined in part by the number of that symbol to the total in the set or group from which the selection is being made. In this manner, the odds of receiving a particular symbol 100 may be specifically selected by the game creator.

[0058]   In one embodiment, symbols 100 may be assigned particular meanings or rules. For example, as detailed below, one or more "wildcard" symbols may be provided. Such symbols may be treated as any other symbol, including more than one different symbol at the same time.

[0059]   All of the positions, and thus displayed symbols 100, may be associated with one or more paylines. Preferably, at least two symbols are associated with each payline. The number of paylines

may vary, with one or more symbols associated with one or more paylines. As detailed below, a payline may have an active or inactive state.

[0060]   Figure 2(b) illustrates one configuration for paylines P in accordance with the game of the invention. In one embodiment, there are eight paylines. Payline P1 is associated with a center row R2 of positions and displayed symbols 100. Payline P2 is associated with a top row R1 of positions and displayed symbols 100. Payline P3 is associated with a bottom row R3 of positions and displayed symbols 100. Payline P4 is associated with a first column C1 of positions and displayed symbols 100. Payline P5 is associated with a center column C2 of positions and displayed symbols 100. Payline P6 is associated with a third column C3 of positions and displayed symbols 100. Payline P7 is associated with positions and displayed symbols 100 extending along a first diagonal, and payline P8 is associated with positions and displayed symbols extending along a second diagonal. In this embodiment, the paylines P1-P8 are all straight and associated with three positions and thus three displayed symbols 100.

[0061]   In accordance with the game, a winning event of the first or main game results if a predetermined combination of symbols 100 is displayed along an activated or active payline P. In one embodiment, paylines P are activated depending on the size of the wager or bet which is placed by a player. In one embodiment, all paylines P may be activated when a bet or wager is placed or payment or other entitlement to play the game exists. In another embodiment, only one or a few paylines P are activated when a bet or wager of a first size is placed (or points used), and additional or all paylines P are not activated unless an additional or larger bet or wager is placed (or point used).

In a preferred embodiment, a base bet or wager activates a single payline P, such as payline P1. An additional incremental bet or wager is required to activate each additional payline P2-P8. A maximum bet of eight times the base bet or wager thus activates all of the paylines P1-8. In one embodiment, a base bet or wager may comprise a single coin or denomination (such as U.S. $.25) or multiple coins (e.g. U.S. $1.00, which is 4 x $.25).

[0062]   In the example illustrated, assume that only payline P1 has been activated. In such event, the player is the winner of the game only if the symbols 100 along payline P1 comprise a predetermined winning set or combination of symbols 100.

[0063]   In one embodiment, a set of symbols 100 is a winning set of symbols if there are at least three of the same symbols in sequence along all or part of the payline. In the example illustrated in Figure 2(b), symbols 100a,100b,100c along payline P1 are a winning combination because there are three sequential ◊ symbols 100. A wide variety of other combinations of symbols 100 may be deemed a winning combination of symbols. For example, specific combinations of different symbols in particular sequences or the like may also be deemed winning combinations.

[0064]   It will also be appreciated that more than one winning combination of symbols 100 may be received. For example, when multiple paylines are active, winning combinations may be received along various of the paylines.

[0065] As described in greater detail below, in one embodiment, it is possible to obtain more than one winning combination along a single payline. It is also possible to achieve more than one winning combination using one or more common symbols.

[0066] In one embodiment, in the event of a winning result while playing the main game, the player may be awarded an award. The award may be in the form of coins, credits or the like, as described above. The amount of the award may vary, such as dependent upon the particular winning combination received. For example, a higher award may be paid for receiving a winning combination which has a lower probability of occurrence. For example, awards may be larger for larger combinations of symbols (e.g., four or more in sequence) or for combinations of symbols having a lower frequency of appearance.

[0067] In accordance with an embodiment of the game of the invention, in the event a winning outcome or result is achieved as a result of the play of the main or first game, a bonus event or opportunity is automatically initiated.

[0068] In one embodiment, the bonus event comprises removing or replacing one or more of the symbols 100 used to play the main game and then determining if the resultant combination of symbols yields one or more winning combinations of symbols.

[0069] One example of a bonus event will be described with reference to Figures 2(c)-2(f). As illustrated in Figure 2(c), as a result of a winning result of the main game in Figure 2(b), symbols

100a,100b,100c associated with the winning result (the three ◊ symbols along payline P1) have been removed. The remaining symbols 100 remain the same.

[0070]   As illustrated in Figure 2(d), replacement symbols 200a (♧), 200b (♡), 200c (♤) have been displayed in the vacated positions. It is then determined if any of the previously displayed symbols 100 and new symbols 200a,200b,200c comprise a predetermined winning combination of symbols. In the embodiment illustrated, the symbols along payline P6 comprise a winning combination (three ♧ symbols).

[0071]   Preferably, as a result of the player receiving a predetermined winning combination of symbols in the bonus event, the player is awarded an award. The award may be a money, credits, points or the like.

[0072]   In a preferred embodiment of the invention, if the player receives a winning bonus event outcome, then the bonus event continues. In this fashion, the player has the opportunity for sequential bonus events. As illustrated in Figure 2(e), the symbols comprising the winning combination have been removed. As illustrated in Figure 2(f), new symbols 300a,300b,300c have been displayed in the vacated positions. As illustrated, these new symbols 300a,300b,300c, in combination with the previous symbols (which include some of the symbols 100 used to play the main game and some replacement symbols 200b,200c used in the play of the first bonus event) are used in the second bonus event.

[0073] In one embodiment, each time a winning combination is received playing a bonus event, the player is awarded an award. Preferably, bonus event play continues until a winning result is not received.

[0074] A variety of embodiments of the bonus event play are contemplated. In the embodiment of the bonus event illustrated, symbols are removed, creating empty positions. Symbols are then located or displayed in those vacant positions. It will be appreciated, however, that the remove and replace steps may be substantially simultaneous, such that symbols appear to simply be replaced.

[0075] As illustrated in Figure 2(c), in one embodiment, bonus event play comprises removing and replacing the symbols associated with winning outcome(s) of the main game. Alternatively, all symbols may be replaced, or symbols other than the winning outcome symbols may be replaced.

[0076] Symbols may be replaced in a variety of fashions. For example, replacement symbols may be selected from a group of symbols which is different than the group from which the original symbols were selected. In an embodiment where the symbols displayed in each position are selected from a set of symbols associated with that particular position, replacement symbols may be selected from that group. The set of symbols may or may not include symbols which have been previously displayed as part of the same game (i.e., "used" symbols may optionally no longer be available for re-display at a point later in the game).

[0077]   The manner by which a winning bonus event outcome is determined may vary. Preferably, a combination of symbols which matches a predetermined winning combination of symbols is only a winning combination if the symbols are along an active payline P.

[0078]   In one embodiment, paylines P which are activated as part of play of the main game remain activated for play of the bonus event(s). For example, if a player placed a wager sufficiently large to activate all of paylines P1-8 as illustrated in Figure 2(b) for play of the main game, then all of those same paylines may remain activated for play of any bonus events.

[0079]   In other embodiment, only certain paylines P are activated for play of any bonus events, regardless of the paylines which are active for play of the main game. For example, only a certain payline, such as payline P1, may be activated for bonus event play. In one embodiment, only the payline or paylines other than the payline(s) with which a main game win was associated may be activated for main game play.

[0080]   It will thus be appreciated that a large number of embodiments of game play are possible in accordance with the game of the invention. Another embodiment of a game of the invention will be described with reference to Figures 3(a) - 3(c), illustrating a number of the variations of the game of the invention.

[0081]   As illustrated in Figure 3(a), a first set of symbols 300 are displayed as part of a main game. The symbols 300 are associated with positions which, in the version illustrated, are arranged in a n x m matrix, where n and m are both 5.

[0082]   The symbols 300 may be displayed in a variety manners, as described in greater detail above. The symbols 300 are preferably once again associated with one or more paylines. As illustrated, ten paylines P1-P10 are provided. These paylines P1-P10 correspond to the rows and columns of symbols 300. Of course, as detailed above, other payline configurations may be utilized, such as diagonals and the like.

[0083]   In the embodiment illustrated, a winning combination of symbols comprises at least three of the same symbol in sequence along an active payline, or as described above such a combination as achieved using one or more wildcard symbols. As illustrated, one winning combination exists along payline P4, where there are three sequential ◊ symbols 300a,300b,300c.

[0084]   This embodiment also illustrates use of a "wildcard" symbol W. As described above, such a symbol may have a variety of properties, such as being construed to be the same as any other symbol, including more than one different symbol. In the embodiment illustrated, the W symbol along payline P4 may thus be construed as a ◊ symbol, such that four of such symbols are arranged sequentially.

[0085] As described in part above, the use of a wildcard symbol may be used to form a winning combination of symbols. For example, a wildcard may be used with two other symbols to form a grouping of three symbols. Alternatively, as illustrated in Figure 3(a), the wildcard symbol may be used to make a larger grouping. As detailed above, a larger winning combination or grouping of symbols may be associated with a larger winning payout.

[0086] As a result of a winning result of the main game, a bonus event is initiated. In accordance with the bonus event as illustrated, one or more symbols 300 are removed. As illustrated in Figure 3(b), the symbols 300a,300b,300c,300d, comprising the winning combination of symbols in the main game, have been removed. The remaining symbols 300 have been moved downwardly in each column to fill the positions of the removed symbols. In this configuration, the symbols 300 appear to move as if subjected to gravity. As illustrated in Figure 3(b), once the symbols have been removed and the remaining symbols have moved down to fill the vacated positions, four empty positions exist in the top row of the matrix.

[0087] As illustrated in Figure 3(c), the empty positions are filled with symbols 400a,400b,400c,400d. It is then determined if any winning combinations of symbols exist along active paylines, in similar fashion to that described above. As illustrated, two winning combinations exist along paylines P6 and P8. A bonus award may be paid for those combinations. The bonus event may then end, or preferably continues in the manner described above until a non-winning bonus event is received.

[0088]   As one aspect of the invention, it will be appreciated that a particular symbol may be associated with more than one winning combination of symbols. This is especially true of a wildcard symbol. A variety of criteria may be applied in such an instance to determine winning combinations.

[0089]   Various examples will be described with reference to Figure 4. As illustrated, three ◊ symbols 500a,500b,500c are located along payline P1. In addition, three ◊ symbols 500b,500d,500e are located along payline P2. Symbol 500b is common to both of these sets of symbols. In one embodiment, a winning combination may be declared and winnings paid for both sets of symbols. In another embodiment, a winning combination may be declared and winnings paid for a single set of the symbols. In yet another embodiment, a specific defined winning amount may be associated with and be paid for such a combination.

[0090]   Figure 4 also illustrates such a combination with a wildcard W symbol 500f. As illustrated, the wildcard symbol 500f may be used to make a set of four ◊ symbols along payline P1, or a set of three □ symbols along that same line, or a set of three ▲ symbols along payline P3.

[0091]   As illustrated, situations may exist where more than one potential winning combination exists along a single payline. In such event, a winning combination may once again be declared for all of those sets, or just one set, such as the largest set or the set with the greatest payout.

[0092]   As described, a wide variety of different symbols may be utilized. For example, the symbols utilized may comprise card indicia comprising the 52 cards of a single deck of cards of four

suits. In such a version, for example, five cards may be displayed in a row. If the cards comprise a predetermined winning combination, such as a "3 of a Kind" or "Two Pair," then a main game win may be declared. Certain of the cards may then be replaced as part of the play of the bonus event. If the resulting set of five cards comprises a winning hand or combination of cards, then a bonus event win may be declared.

[0093]   A variety of aspects and advantages of the game of the invention will now be appreciated. In accordance with the invention, a game is provided which provides a player with a bonus event opportunity. In accordance with the invention, the bonus event opportunity is automatic if a win is received as a result of play of the main game. Advantageously, this opportunity for a bonus occurs without the player being required to place a side bet or engage in any act other than play the main game.

[0094]   In addition, the game provides for possible sequential bonus events. As described, a player is permitted to engage in bonus events so long as winning bonus events are received. Thus, a player has the opportunity to win not one, but sequential, bonus events.

[0095]   Various other embodiments of the game are contemplated. As indicated above, the game of the invention may be implemented as a non-wager game. For example, the game may be implemented as an amusement or arcade type game. In one embodiment, a player may be required to pay to play the game without any chance of being paid a winning. The player may also be required to subscribe to a service to have access to the game. For example, the game may be

implemented on the Internet, with game information generated at a server and transmitted to a player's computer. In this format, the player may be required to subscribe in order to gain access to the server or to the game information.

[0096]   One aspect of the invention is a gaming environment for presenting the game. As indicated above, one such environment may comprise an electronically controlled gaming device including a video display. Other environments include a gaming network including a server and one or more gaming terminals, such as a player's home computer, or a gaming device including one or more mechanical and/or virtual reels.

[0097]   As indicated above, the game may be implemented as a wager-based or gambling game. As described above, the game may be implemented as a "Class III" type game. The game may be implemented as a "Class II" type game. For example, the game may be implemented as a video lottery or bingo type game.

[0098]   In this regard, it will be appreciated that the game of the invention may be implemented in a variety of manners. As implemented in a traditional Class III type game, after a player places a wager and game play is initiated, one or more random number generators (RNGs) may be utilized to define the one or more symbols used to play the main game, and thus the outcome of the main game. In the event of a main game win, the same or another RNG may be called to define the outcome of the secondary event or events. In other words, the game progresses in step-wise fashion with the status of each part of the game not known until it is played.

[0099] In a Class II or other environment, as is known, entire "games" may be downloaded, such as from a remote server to a player's terminal. For example, after placing a bet, a server may download information to the player's terminal which is sufficient to present an entire game. This data may include data used to generate the symbols for the main game and any symbols associated with secondary event play, if such exists. In other words, the result of the entire game is known at the time it is provided to the gaming terminal, though the player does not know it. In such a version, data sets representing entire games may be stored at the server, and an RNG may be used to call one of those game sets. In this regard, steps of the invention such as "determining if symbols used to play the main game comprise a winning set" may in a sense internally occur before other steps, such as the display of those symbols to the player.

[0100] It is also possible to implement the game in a card or board type format. In one embodiment, for example, a card may be printed with symbols which are then covered so as to not be visible. A player may purchase the card and then reveal some or all of the symbols. If the player is a winner of the main game, the player may be permitted to participate in a bonus event. In the bonus event, the player may be permitted to reveal an additional number of symbols.

[0101] For example, six symbols may be arranged in a first row and six symbols arranged in a second row. The player may be permitted to reveal three symbols from the first row. If those symbols are a winning combination, the player may be permitted to reveal up to three symbols from

the second row. If those symbols are a winning combination or the symbols when combined with the symbols in the first row are a winning combination, the player may win the bonus event.

[0102] In one or more embodiments, the game of the invention may itself be played as a bonus or secondary event of another game(s) or event(s). For example, a player may be presented with a first game, such as the well known game of video poker. Dependent upon a variety of criteria, such as the outcome of that game, the game of the invention may be presented. For example, if a particular winning hand is received while playing video poker, the game of the invention may be triggered. The play of the game then proceeds as described above. In such an embodiment, the "main game" as described herein may be referred to as a first event of a bonus round, and the second event or events herein may be referred to as the second event of the bonus round.

[0103] In this embodiment, a player may not be required to place a wager to play the game, as it may be a bonus event to a main game. Any award of winnings may be, for example, a bonus amount to the base game.

[0104] In one embodiment, the symbols which are used to play the game of the invention may be generated by or associated with another game, such as a main game. For example, while playing a main game, certain events may trigger symbols which are used to play the game of the invention when configured as a bonus or secondary event to that main game.

[0105]   It will be understood that the above described arrangements of apparatus and the method therefrom are merely illustrative of applications of the principles of this invention and many other embodiments and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the claims.